

## *Duplicating Federal Videos for an Online Archive*

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By Brian Stelter

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WASHINGTON — Dust off a disc. Maybe it's video of a Bob Hope Christmas show, or maybe it's the Apollo 11 moon landing. Insert a blank disc. Duplicate.

It sounds monotonous because it is. But every time Liz Pruszko presses the start button on a DVD machine, she knows she is helping to unlock the thousands of videos tucked away in the National Archives.

"It just seems like such a shame to not have this content out there," Ms. Pruszko said.

When she says "out there," she is talking about the Web, where it might seem that every conceivable video clip of federal importance is already stored, just waiting to be searched for. That is far from true. But she is nudging the government in that direction.

Ms. Pruszko is a volunteer for the International Amateur Scanning League, an invention of the longtime public information advocate Carl Malamud. The league plans to upload the archives' collection of 3,000 DVDs in what Mr. Malamud calls an "experiment in crowd-sourced digitization."

Armed with nothing but a DVD duplicator and a YouTube account, the volunteers have copied and uploaded, among other video clips, an address by John F. Kennedy; a silent film about the Communist "red scare"; a training video on farming; and a Disney film for World War II soldiers about how to avoid malaria, in Spanish. So far, nothing elusive has emerged — but the project is in its infancy.

"It's a cornucopia of information," said Justin Grimes, another league volunteer.

The league is a small demonstration that volunteers can sometimes achieve what bureaucracies can't or won't. The government's 10-year broadband plan, to be submitted to Congress this week, will include a vision for Video.gov, a proposed home for video from federal agencies. The proposal is sure to be cheered by people who want the government to put more materials online. But Mr. Malamud and his volunteers are not waiting.

Mr. Malamud, who spends most of his time pushing for broader access to legal documents online, had already uploaded 1,300 videos from other government sources, like the Federal Aviation Administration and National Technical Information Service. But "the motherlode is the archives," he said.

To put those DVDs online, he needed volunteers, and he found them at CopyNight, a monthly gathering of copyright law enthusiasts that he visited at a restaurant near Union Station last December. (CopyNight members are generally supportive of relaxations to copyright laws.) Mr. Malamud raised the idea a month later.



Carl Malamud, who conceived the project, calls it an “experiment in crowd-sourced digitization.”

Heidi Schumann for The New York Times

Though it may seem to be an odd pursuit, especially for no pay, Ms. Pruszko, who is a project manager for a Web development company, took to the idea. Ms. Pruszko said she explained to her fiancé that “copying DVDs sounds boring, but it’s not the copying that counts — it’s what it represents and what it results in.” What it represents, she said, is access to information, a cornerstone of democracy.

Although the DVDs are all technically available to the public, they are hard to see unless a person visits the archive or pays for a copy via Amazon.com. With the scanning project, they are a few mouse clicks away.

Ms. Pruszko started doing the copying last month, and returned to the archives building last Saturday to copy her 50th DVD.

At No. 50, “Carl promised me a poster,” she joked.

There are also laminated badges and “Public Domain Merit Badges,” all meant to convey a seriousness of purpose along with a sense of humor.

In red envelopes labeled “FedFlix,” his DVD-by-mail variation on Netflix, the volunteers mail the DVD copies to Mr. Malamud’s home in Northern California, where he uploads them to YouTube, the Internet Archive Web site and an independent server. Mr. Malamud said that the volunteer work hardly reduces the need for the government to increase its own digitization efforts.

“I try to get the government to change by showing them what’s possible,” he said.

David S. Ferriero, the archivist of the United States, said the archives were fully supportive of what the citizen group was doing.

“My goal is to make available electronically as much content as possible,” he said, adding that the FedFlix copies are sufficiently high-quality that the archives would not have to duplicate them once more.

The scanning league is starting with the 3,000 or so DVDs in the collection, because they are the easiest to duplicate. But there is much more to be done: the archives are said to house more than 200,000 videos.

“Knowing Carl, he has other things planned,” Ms. Pruszko said.